Community Site: Doing it the Smart Way

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These days everyone is getting into developing a community site. The idea is getting bigger and bigger as community sites like myspace.com and dailycandy.com make enormous amounts of money. Usually the idea for such a site first comes to people who see an everyday issue or need that needs to be fulfilled. However, these multi-million dollar ideas come to people who are usually not that technical or not technical at all. For them technically implementing even a simple idea is a formidable task.

Although community sites have been out for a while, yet surprisingly the approach people take on how to get it done is still not the best. Even though the approach one takes   towards developing the site is critical enough to be the deciding factor between the site's success or failure.

Entrepreneurs usually look for a technical person, such as a web developer, who could do the development work for them. The developer who is probably an expert in tools such as PHP or .NET would do a good job for the entrepreneur as far as technical expertise is concerned. You could tell the developer to design a forum, a blog, chat or classified for you, features usually associated with a community site. He/she would do that, but it would go through the regular development cycle. This usually involves making specifications, designing, coding and testing. This comes down to about 3-4 months of work, if not more, before a forum functionality becomes available. You would also have to keep looking for new features all the time to include on your site in order to stay attractive and competitive for your member's community.

If each feature takes 3-4 months to develop then you can imagine that by the time a few features are done you have already spent a considerable amount of time and money. To top it off, even though you now have special features your competitors who perhaps have a bigger team of developers, already have those features and more. In the time it took you to develop your site's special features some of your members already left because of the time it took you to get to that point. So the question is how to be the one who is not outdone.

What you should be looking for is not just a programmer but a domain expert. Community sites are their own domain. A domain expert with the right tools could make your life very easy. Rather than spending your time thinking about how to technically make your site possible, you can instead focus on getting the business. You could launch a successful site in a very short time with the right team of experts. By experts I mean people who have most of the popular features already developed and can implement them with little or no customization. Or they could use an existing Content Management System to get the same thing done. Just imagine, the same feature that was going to take at least 3-4 months to deliver will be ready to go in a matter of days!

This team would also know what technology to use, .NET, PHP, JSP or something else. As a business person this should not be your burden. Your concern of cost effectiveness, good performance and deliverable in the shortest amount of time should be taken care of. Your focus would be on enhancing your business while your team of experts works on the technology. The bottom line is that a team of domain experts (instead of developers) will be able to give you the

right features to stay competitive in the market, cost less in terms of time and money and not have you worried about how to get it done.

You could compare the first way of developing a community site to building a wooden fence by going to the forest, chopping down trees, cutting logs into planks the right size, treating the wood and then nailing the pieces together. Unless the aforementioned is part of your normal business, the smarter way to building that fence around your house would be to go to a Home Depot and get a ready made fence. Of-course for your business to take off other factors are involved as well but with the right approach you are giving yourself a much better chance of success.

Adaptive Solutions, Inc

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